

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING

December 8, 2009

First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

MINUTES

Members Present: Touria Eaton, Ruth Hazzard, Jaime Tidlund, Pauline Lannon, and Sally Fitz, Richard Roznoy (Non-Voting Planning Board Rep)
Non-Members Present Diana Stein (Select Board), David Ziomek (Staff Liaison) and Tanya Cushman

Minutes:

The minutes from September 8, 2009 and October 13, 2009 were reviewed and approved.

Meadow Street:

The Meadow Street Planning Board meeting last week will be continued until the following week. Ruth attended the meeting and also emailed the letter drafted by the Agricultural Commission in the spring of 2008 again. The building plan is essentially the same as before. It was discussed whether or not the Agricultural Commission should submit something else on the topic, regarding all the other parcels and how there is a farmland overlay.

Tanya Cushman addressed the fact that there is no one actively advocating for the preservation of this land, and how there are many more issues to be discussed, not just Ag issues. It was mentioned that the fair market value of this land is over \$1 million, the owners are open to other ideas rather than building the storage facility, as long as they make the money they need to make. Some ideas about what might fit there are: A co-op, farm stand, cold storage, farmers market, or even a slaughter house.

The Agricultural Commission would like to see several things brought up at the Planning Board meeting such as a traffic study, as well as the fact that this climate controlled building would have heat and cooling units running 24/7 to help control the climate inside which would be very disruptive to the animals. Also the fact that this building will destroy the areas scenic beauty needs to be brought up. Beyond recommending preservation it is important to have an Ag person there to discuss with the Planning Board the concerns as well as some of the alternative options.

Talks about a sub-committee being formed to discuss options for this land were had, the thought that a town body supporting this would make a greater impact, there was also a thought that CISA may have some ideas for what there is a demand for.

CPAC Update:

The preliminary proposals are due the 18th; there are 6 potential proposals to present which are all at different stages.

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Dave also mentioned the Wentworth Farm, which would bring the town 5 acres of land to put towards the old historic house that was preserved. This would also leave land to lease maybe to new young farmers just getting into the business; there will be an update on this in January.

Spring Street:

The Lord Jeff project is on the fast track to get going and get completed. How does their plan mesh with the Town's ideas and timeline for Spring Street?

Farmer Database:

Sally has received some farmer addresses and survey information together with the Agricultural Commission she is trying to figure out:

- Who are the farmers in Amherst?

- What types of farms are they?

- The challenges they face

- What problems can we help and have an impact on

It is important for the Agricultural Commission to identify the problems we can help on and try to bridge the gap between the Agricultural Commission and the farms.

The next meeting will be held on January 12, 2010 at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted
Jaime Tidlund

To: Planning Board
From: Ruth Hazzard, Chair, Amherst Agricultural Commission
Date: December 13, 2009
Regarding: Amherst Enterprise Park - Climate Controlled Storage

The Amherst Agricultural Commission at its December meeting reviewed the Andrews & Leverdiere application for a climate controlled storage on Meadow St. We agreed upon the following concerns and recommendations regarding this application:

1. **Agricultural Protection under Amherst Master Plan.** The Master Plan which is currently under final review by the PB emphasizes the importance of conserving concentrated areas for agriculture and focusing residential and commercial development in other areas. The Amherst Open Space and Recreation Plan takes the same approach. This Meadow St. parcel is in the heart of one of Amherst's most important, contiguous and protected agricultural zones. This parcel is surrounded by active farm businesses whose cultural, historical and economic value has been recognized and supported by the towns of Hadley and Amherst and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The soils are some of the most productive in the US, and the quantity and quality of food and feed produced on neighboring farms is impressive. There are six Amherst APR properties that are close to this parcel, whose public value (historical, cultural, scenic and economic) has been deemed worthy of both town and state investment. The owners of these farms have relinquished their right to sell their properties for development and thus are fully committed to and reliant upon farming for their livelihoods -- a condition which makes them more vulnerable to any detrimental impact of neighboring site uses. We believe that it is the responsibility of the PB and the town of Amherst to respect and protect this public investment and this private commitment. Further, this zone is bordered by additional farmland currently in Chapter 61 A, by more protected APR land in Hadley, and by conservation land in Amherst, all of which create a scenic, economic, historical and cultural region that is unique not only in the Connecticut Valley but in the Commonwealth as a whole. The size, proportions, visual impact, noise, wind, and traffic associated with the proposed Climate Controlled Storage will have negative impacts upon this valuable resource and these should be mitigated by significant changes in the site plan design.
2. **Zoning, Use by Right, and Site Plan Review.** The parcel is zoned Light Industrial which allows 'warehouse or other enclosed building for storage' under site plan review. Site plan review criteria and guidelines that *'shall be used by the Board when evaluating the site plan and all information submitted as part of the application'* include *'protecting abutting properties from detrimental site characteristics resulting from the proposed use, including but not limited to air and water pollution, flood, noise odor, dust, vibration, lights or visually offensive structures or site features'* (11.2402) as well as *'protection of unique or important natural, historic or scenic features'* (11.2410) We urge the Planning Board to take these criteria seriously, and require that the site plan mitigate the detrimental characteristics of this project.
3. **Require additional studies and information prior to ruling on the site plan.** We urge the PB **not** to grant the requested waiver of a traffic study, but to require a traffic study that considers daily, weekly, and seasonal traffic patterns. It should take into account the fact that during the growing season this stretch of road is heavily used by tractors that move slowly and turn into farm roads, and that the safety of those driving the tractors as well as that of drivers in faster-moving vehicles be considered. The estimates made of the number of vehicles expected to use the Climate Controlled Storage should be better justified (estimates of 14 per day seem low given the nine loading docks) and the PB should review traffic expectations based on the highest possible use of the building, since once it is built there will be no further control over traffic volume. We also suggest that the PB require the applicant to provide elevations that *depict the building in its setting from all approaches*, because we believe that this largethree-story building will tower over the surrounding fields, homes and barns resulting in ugly, serious, and permanent visual pollution of this beautiful, unique farming area. We also urge a study of wind impact, because this massive building, sited so close to the barnyard and outbuildings of J&J farm, will very likely accelerate and funnel winds from the north directly into those farm spaces. The strength of winds in this landscape is already significant, but funneling effects can make them very destructive. Potential detrimental effects of increased wind speed are harm to dairy cows, increased soil erosion and dust, damage to buildings, and disturbance of workers.

4. **Identify and mitigate negative impacts on neighboring homes and agricultural businesses.** In addition to the items mentioned in # 2 above, noise pollution from the air conditioning and heating units is likely. Climate controlled storage will require active cooling, heating and/or humidity management day and night, yearlong. The noise of these units is significant. The noise level needs to be clearly defined and quantified by the applicant and the impact on farm neighbors (human and animal) assessed. Impact of the proposed building on the dairy animals at J&J farm will be significant, as grazing, barnyard, and laneway areas are *directly* on the border, and would be approximately 25 ft from the Storage building. These animals are sensitive to noise, light, wind, and traffic disturbance. The disturbance during the construction phase will be extreme and could be especially harmful. A dairy farm operates 24/7 year round, and the animals must be well cared for and protected during their lifetime. Both the construction phase and the use phase of the building could cause the farm to lose health and productivity of their animals – a serious economic loss -- or cause them to have to move animals to other fields that are currently used for crops – also an economic loss. These disturbances threaten the viability of J&J farm – the last operating dairy farm in Amherst -- and should not be allowed in any approved site design. These impacts should be fully mitigated by changes in site design before approval.
5. **Assume greatest use and impact.** The applicant describes likely or expected use patterns and volume of the building, but in fact the uses could expand beyond what is predicted. We urge the PB to review the site plan with greatest possible use (and associated traffic, noise, light, etc) in mind.